1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

133 alkaline plains and approaches the marshy lakes that are abundantly
137 present in the rainy season and frequently absent in the dry period. The acacia and the eucalyptus are familiar and frequent in both the low and the high lands, and spear grass covers the land in dense growths during the months of rain.

136 The animals, with certain minor variations, are the usual marsupials and monotremes found in Australia, with the bat and wild domestic dog the only mammalia living in the region. Nature is bountiful with
[262] many varieties of birds, fish, and other animals; but vegetable foods, although plentiful, are limited in variety.

144 The Murngin people belong to the aboriginal Australoid race found throughout Australia—not Mongoloid, Negroid, or Caucasian, but a variant group which seems to be a blend of many of the features of the
[197] white and black races.[2] Their language is one of the Australo-Dravidian linguistic group. They belong to a Stone Age culture; were they placed
105 in our own chronology, their technological development would fall somewhere between the Old and the New Stone Ages.

The Murngin civilization is a simple Australian culture with a small hunting and gathering population which lives off the sea and the land. The natural environment which surrounds it and drastically affects native behavior consists of *two changes which make up the yearly cycle*; one of these is extremely rainy, producing a period of scarcity, and the other a dry period when there is an abundance of food. The technology can be described briefly as the adaptive mechanisms of the general society to these two parts of the cycle of nature.

614 The social organization must be given in a more detailed descrip-
823 tion. The fundamental basis of the society is an elaborate kinship[3] system in which everyone is related to everyone else. This kinship system is organized into more general units which are patrilineal,[3] exogamic[3] clans[3] which have local territories that were "given to them by the totems."[3] All parts of the clan land have totemic references. Each clan has multiple totems; all clans have at least one, possibly more, sacred water holes where live the high totems, the totemic ancestors, the ancestral dead, and the totemic spirits of the unborn. The names of all clansmen have totemic significance, and the whole general totemic pattern is related to the clan.

[101] [2] See Appendix VII.—The term "Black" in the title of this book, *A Black Civilization*, is not to be interpreted as describing these people as purely Negroid. The term refers, rather, to their popular name, "Australian Blacks," and to the name they accept for themselves from the Australian whites, "Blackfellows."

[3] See Glossary of Technical Terms, page 566.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

CHAPTER II

THE LOCAL ORGANIZATION

The eight tribes[1] considered in this book, of which the Murngin[2] (fire sparks) is the principal one, have the same kinship system, the same form of local organization, largely the same myths and ceremonies, and, in general, the same culture, with only those minor variations found in any homogeneous civilization. This similarity is particularly true of the basic structure of the local organization.

The Murngin and surrounding peoples have the following institutions which organize them into local groupings:[3] (1) patrilineal clans, (2) moieties, (3) phratries, (4) tribes, and (5) economic groups called hordes. Within these institutions and helping to integrate them functionally into a more complex society are a limited family, a classificatory kinship system, and a modified subsection system described in Chapter III.

The clan and moiety are the two most important units in the local organization.[4] The clan will be examined first, then the moiety with the clan grouping, and after this the phratry and tribe—the clan and moiety first, because they are the fundamental structures found

[1] See map, page 40, for the following tribes: Yaernungo, Burera, Murngin, Barlamomo, Djinba, Ritarngo, Yandjinung, and Dai.

[2] As stated earlier the tribe can hardly be said to exist in this area, and of all the tribes studied, the Murngin is the weakest in form. The word Murngin was found as a designation only after much effort. The people do not think of themselves under this name or classification. The word has been used by me as a general term for all of the eight tribes in the area and for the groups of people located in the central part of the territory of the eight tribes. I have seized upon this name as a convenient and concise way of talking about this whole group of people: had any of the other tribes who possess the particular type of social organization found in this area been located in the center of the group, I should have used the name of that tribe rather than Murngin.

[3] See Glossary for all native and technical terms.

[4] On pages 39 ff. will be found a list of clans, with the English equivalents of the native clan names. The common or ordinary name is given in most cases, as well as the sacred or totemic name. These clans are numbered to enable the reader to refer to the geographical location of each clan on the map which immediately follows the list.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
OI 17 Murngin OI 17

throughout the eight tribes. The horde, dealt with in the chapter on technology, and the phratry may or may not be present in a given area. The tribe is of minor importance in native life.

The Clan

The Murngin clan is an exogamic patrilineal group averaging forty or fifty individuals who possess a common territory which averages 300 square miles.[5] This group possesses one or more sacred totemic water holes, formed by a creator totem, in which the whole of the tribal life is focussed; all members of the clan are born from this water hole, and all go back to it at death; in it the totem's spirits live with the mythological ancestor, the souls of the dead, and the unborn children. The male members of the clan who can be the permanent occupants of the group's land possess totemic emblems in common.

A clan frequently has an exclusive name for its people and another preferred one that defines the language spoken by this people as different from that of all other clans. The clan is exogamous by virtue of belonging to a moiety, which prevents marriage within its half of the tribe. Theoretically an individual can marry into any one of the clans in the opposite moiety. The tribal and intertribal myths of the moiety which are saturated with themes expressing the local organization of these people always devote small parts of their stories to the special circumstances of the creation of a clan. They also give its association with the totems and other elements of tribal life considered important by these people. The more localized myths which concern only two or three clans usually symbolize intra-clan solidarity and inter-clan antagonism. The ceremonies possessed by a clan, like the totems, are ordinarily owned by other similar groups belonging to the same moiety, although local variations in totem and ceremony occur.

The following relatives are always found in a clan: marikmo[6] (father's father and father's father's sister), bapa (father), mokul bapa (father's sister), wawa (older brother), yukiyuko (younger brother), yeppa (sister), gatu (son and daughter), and maraitcha (son's son and son's daughter). In other words, these relatives are in ego's brother's

[5] For additional elements in the clan configuration see Part III.

[6] See Chart II, page 59, for the place of kinship terms in the kinship system. Native terms have been used more frequently than the author would have liked, but it was impossible always to give an exact translation in a few words. It seems better to define a word carefully at least once, and thereafter use the term. (See Glossary of Native Terms.)

4: Berndt & Berndt E-5 (1946-1947) 1948
OI17 Murngin OI17

particular spirit-being has its mythology, ceremonies and elaborate song cycles, some consisting of several hundreds of separate and lengthy songs. This is particularly the case with the concept of the *'Wawəlak* Sisters, which have both sacred and secular songs and ceremonies.[2]

The aborigines of this area belong to what Professor Lloyd Warner has called the "Murngin" culture.[3] They consist of groups of separate clans with a more or less common cultural background[4]: "Murngin" is one name of one of these many clans. They stretch from a point north of Rose River on the south-east of Arnhem Land (opposite Groote Eylandt) north along the coast through Blue Mud and Caledon Bays, Cape Arnhem and Yirrkalla, English Company, Wessell and Elcho Islands, Arnhem Bay, Crocodile Islands (around Milingimbi) to Cape Stewart, but do not penetrate far into the interior. Their dialects vary, but belong to one language group.[5] The clans are divided between the *'jiritʃa* and *'du:a* patrilineal moieties. A subsection system is being gradually introduced from the south and south-west, but has not yet been fully accepted.

These natives are semi-nomadic and hunt and collect food over wide areas. They rely principally on marine foods, which are plentiful, so that their economy is more or less balanced throughout the whole year.

For many years these coastal aborigines have been in direct and indirect contact with alien groups, particularly with the Malayan and Macassan traders who travelled down to the north coast of Australia from the East Indies in search of trepang (bêche de mer) and other natural products obtained by local aborigines.[6] In the course of years of trading, these visitors had much association with the indigenous inhabitants, and established settlements at desirable sites, particularly on the north-eastern corner of Arnhem Land, where they stayed for several months in each year. After the wet season, in about May or June, they returned in their proas on the south-east winds, sometimes taking aborigines as part of their crew. This contact ended (being prohibited by law) in 1907, but Japanese pearlers continued to visit the shores up to the recent war.

Such intensive contact over a long period made a strong impression on the aborigines; this can be observed to-day in certain elements of the religious life and dogma, in secular ceremonies and songs, in mortuary rites and songs, in mythology

[2] A detailed study of north-eastern Arnhem Land religious beliefs and dogma will be published later.

[3] L. Warner, *A Black Civilization*, 1937.

[4] They may be conveniently termed the 'Wulamba Confederacy. *Vide* also T. Webb, "Tribal Organization in Eastern Arnhem Land," *Oceania*, Vol. III, No. 4, p. 410.

[5] *Vide* A. Capell, "Languages of Arnhem Land, North Australia," *Oceania*, Vol. XII, No. 4, and Vol. XIII, No. 1. The collective dialects of this language group can, for convenience, be called *'Mi:wulf 'mala*.

[6] The date of their first contact is a matter of speculation, but is possibly much earlier than has hitherto been stated. A comparatively large collection of pottery shards, recovered from Port Bradshaw, not far distant from Yirrkalla, to be discussed later, may enable an approximate date to be fixed for the establishment of the Macassan settlements, remains of which are still known to the natives.

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
OI17 Murngin OI17

CHAPTER 2

THE ARNHEM LAND ABORIGINES

142 Who are the people of Arnhem Land? What is the pattern of their life, the background against which these events took place?

The physical characteristics of the Australian Aborigines as a whole are well known – their chocolate-brown skin, wavy hair, slightly prognathoid features and rather broad nostrils. The people of the Arnhem Land coast show some differences from those of the immediate inland and of the centre. Food of all kinds is more plentiful, and fresh water easier to find; and so they are rather more solidly built, with heavier legs and broader shoulders than the "desert" natives. Their skin appears to be darker, al- [144] though here and there are lighter individuals who show the influence of part-Malayan or Macassan descent. Generally speak- [152] ing, they are lively and excitable and show emotion more readily 578 than their southern neighbours; all along this coast the tribes have a long history of "blood feuds", kept up between one family and another, or among various clans. They prefer to dispose of their enemies by open killings rather than by the secret work of magical spells – although these too, it is said, are freely employed.

● 105 Since on this fertile coast the Aborigines do not have to exert themselves quite so strenuously as those in more barren and inhospitable regions, they can devote more time to material culture – to weapons, cave and bark paintings, and a wide range of sacred objects. For this reason, too, we find numbers of clan and tribal groups within a comparatively small area. Tribal territories are more restricted than in the semi-desert areas where men and women must be almost continuously on the move in their search for food.

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943) 1949
OI17 Murngin OI17

2.

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

OWNERSHIP OF LAND, ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND THE ORGANISATION OF WORK

000 To an economist who has studied Malinowski's account of economic structure and organisation in the Trobriand Islands, and whose ideas of primitive economics are based on this information, the fact must be stressed that there is a vast gap, culturally, between the relatively advanced Papuo-Melanesian people of the community studied by Malinowski and the Australian aborigines.

105 231 The natives of Arnhem Land are a nomadic people who live by hunting and collecting. They have no settled village life, no gardens or agriculture, they know nothing of pottery, and they have no domestic animals other than the half-wild dingo, which serves as boon companion and hunting ally. Although the evidence suggests that the dingo accompanied the aborigines on their journey to Australia, he has never become truly domesticated but has remained a "hanger-on" and has preserved an aloof independence through the centuries.

105 The people have a simple but specialised material culture, and show much skill in technology. Their houses are well-constructed and of several distinct types, each well-adapted to a special environment or seasonal condition, or related to material available. They possess no looms but are expert

in weaving and spinning by hand, and employ a simple spindle for the manufacture of string from opossum fur and human hair. They are skilled as wood carvers and make elaborately-barbed spear heads of wood, carved sacred totemic objects, and grave posts, as well as wooden dugout canoes. They also possess some skill in the working of metal, and make fine iron spear heads by beating out, cold, such unpromising material as odds and ends of scrap metal, rigging screws from ships, heavy metal drums, and even water pipes. In many of these processes the possession of special skill is recognised by the use of a distinctive name, and in their technology there is evidence of the beginning of craft specialisation.

Some account of the social organisation of the natives of Arnhem Land will be necessary in order to understand the economic organisation, food gathering and food preparation, and particularly the division of labour and the distribution of food.

The people of Eastern Arnhem Land are organised on a basis of localised totemic clans with patrilineal descent. The bond between members of a clan is descent, or belief in descent, from a common ancestor. Just as the individuals within each clan are believed to be related, so the clans themselves are considered to be linked to one another by the bonds of kinship which once existed among the clan ancestors or culture heroes who were the founders of the clans, thereby establishing a permanent relationship between the groups containing their kin which are believed to be descended from them.

In at least one respect the social organisation of Arnhem Land, east of Cape Stewart, is atypical. The definite tribal organisation which is a characteristic feature of most other